

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: VERONICA SOBON
INTERVIEWER: WINIFRED CONNERTON
DATE: MAY 14, 1988**

**W = WINIFRED
A = ANNETTE
V = VERONICA**

SG-NA-T043

This is Winifred Connerton working with Annette Gamache on May 14, 1988. We are interviewing Veronica Sobon in her home on 29 North Summer Street in Adams, Massachusetts. This is for the Shifting Gears Sprague oral history project.

[Just about half the first side of this tape was blank-volume must not have been turn on]

W: Was it harder assembling, assembling parts of things, or was it harder being a clerk? Or, just in general was (--)

V: No, I think the production work was harder. The uh, clerking was uh, maybe, I don't know how to put it, but uh, there was a little more pressure there, but I enjoyed it more. I really did.

W: What was the, what did you enjoy most about your job? What part of it did you like most?

V: Well I guess just being part of it, you know. Being with the people and uh, I really uh, don't know how to put it. But I just always enjoyed being in the middle of everything.

W: Uh huh. Um, do you have a memory of a most, a very difficult time that happened while you were working?

V: Well yes. I uh, at the very end, before, about a year before I retired, maybe because I was getting older and thinking about retiring, but I uh, changed jobs into the shipping department, and it was a lot of pressure. And uh, about putting the work out on time, you know, if the order was due today, no matter how much of it wasn't ready it was kind of up to me to make sure that it is ready. And uh, and then there were other related jobs that went with it and it was hard to handle. I felt the pressure most the last year I was working there, because I just didn't have one

job, I had to do some testing, some shipping, some packing, bringing it to the shipping room on time and all that. That was, that was about the hardest thing on me and I was very happy that it was time to retire.

W: Was there a lot of responsibility with that?

V: Yes there was. Although there was an overseer, but uh, it was up to me, because if I didn't do it right, well then it was my fault. And uh, and uh, then I found out that when I retired they hired three people to do the job I did.

W: Do you have a most memorable, a part of an enjoyable time? A memory from that?

V: Yes there was. When I was on the desk there, there were some people that would come to me with their personal problems. And I don't mean problems, but they just wanted to talk to someone, you know? Well I would find time you know, to go with them to the ladies room, or something, you know, and talk to them. Or, and at that time my foreman, my boss was so understanding you know, he says, you go ahead you take care of her. And it, it made me feel so good that people trusted me enough to uh, some of the stuff was really personal, you know. And I enjoyed just the thought of somebody you know, thinking enough of me to uh, to confide in me and to trust me not to tell anyone, you know. And sometimes it's hard to keep it to yourself, but you give your word and that was it. I mean it gave me just a good feeling. And then the other part, another thing that I was uh, enjoyed very much is being a Logue reporter. [W: Um!] And uh, not that I was anything special, but they thought I was you know. And they remembered us twice a year with a nice banquet and a summer picnic. And they really went all out to show us their appreciation, the company. And uh, I enjoyed that very much. I really felt like one of the people you know, that are doing more than just working there for a pay, you know. We didn't get paid for Logue reporting, but we sure were appreciated in other ways, you know?

W: What did a Logue reporter do? What was it in particular.?

V: Well in your own department you know, you had to kind of see what was going on. People that uh, nothing big. It was people going away vacation, or something bad happening to them sometimes. All the deaths in the family, or any new borns, or anything and anything. Or maybe some promotion, or uh, whatever. We just took notes for a whole month and then we'd put it together as much as we could, and as well as we could. And they usually put it in just the way we set it down on paper. So we had to be careful and not to overdo, or. And it had to be interesting. They wanted it interesting, not just jot down the facts, you know? But while this one was doing this, the other girl was doing something else. While this one went skiing to Colorado, that one went down to Florida, you know, and enjoying the sun and the beach. You know, things like that. It wasn't nothing special, but just, so that the other departments, and maybe their friends and relatives could read the paper and know what's going on.

W: Oh. Um, now what was your, how did your relationships with your supervisors, how were they? Were they good, or?

V: Most of them, they were good. Some just could never be satisfied. No matter what you did,

or how you did it, or how much you did it, you, you're suppose to do it and they sometimes even demanded more. But most of them were nice. Oh, I had some foreman that really were nice, understanding and helpful. And uh, and in general it was all right. There was a couple of group leaders, not the foreman were all right, but a couple of group leaders that were a little (--) Maybe they didn't feel good some days and they just took it out on us.

W: Were there any main issues that just were really hard to deal with your supervisors with? Certain conflicts?

V: I only had one instance where they posted a job and I signed up for it. And all you have to wait is about three weeks. And uh, I wasn't hearing anything from them, so I approach our union steward, because that's the way we, that's the procedure. If we couldn't, didn't hear anything we had to go to them. So she in turn went to higher up there, and she told me that she didn't know if I was going to get that job. Well I didn't see any reason. I was the only one that signed up for that job and it was, I had the right to get it. So uh, I went up to the big office there to the plant manager and I had it out with him. Well he said, you know, that there are others that uh, are more seniority or whatever, but he didn't have anybody on the paper. I said, well nobody else signed. I said who is, who is it that signed, you know, that has more seniority than I have. Well he didn't say, and so it took another three weeks, but I got my job.

W: What job was it that you had signed up for?

V: Well at that time I was on bonus, and I couldn't do it no matter how. Not only I, but even the other girls. And there was a job posted that was a general operator, where they could put you on any job they want to, any day, you know. And that's why they didn't demand bonus, because they kept pushing you from one job to another. And that was about three years before I retired. So I just wanted to relax a little bit you know. And so I uh, finally did get that job. And uh, there was not problem like uh, you know, nobody had to fight about it or anything. We just, just had to let him know that I know I have the job coming, and there's no reason why I can't get it. And I did. [W: Oh!] And I did very well, nobody ever complained. I did my, you know, whatever they told me I did. And seeing that I was almost on the way to retire, I, I just wanted to try a little bit of everything. And I (--)

W: Umhm. What different kinds of things did you end up doing?

V: Well it was mostly production work, but it was from assembling to stacking work, or shipping, or uh, solder, a little bit of soldering once in awhile. Nothing heavy, you know, just light work. But it was uh, it had to be in the same department. I couldn't, they couldn't just put me here and there. So there wasn't that much uh (--) Well from the very first uh, I don't know how you put (--) When they bring that work to the department from paper rolling, then they assemble, then they solder, then they put it in the ovens. And after a few days or so you take it out of the ovens. And so all that work, you know, anywheres where they need a girl, girl was out, or whatever, well I was put on that job. And I didn't mind, because I never knew what I was going to do, but it didn't matter because I didn't have to make bonus. And I gave them my eight hours work, but I didn't have that pressure on me anymore.

W: Now what was the bonus?

V: Well if they give you a pan of work and the paper said you had to put out a hundred pieces in a certain amount of time, well that was base rate. And if you put out a hundred and twenty pieces in that amount of time, well then you're twenty pieces went towards your bonus. And it was, every, every job has its own rate, and it's own file number, and unless you're in it it's so complicated. It's hard to explain. But uh, and sometimes you couldn't even make that hundred, because if you wanted to make good work so that it wouldn't be rejected or something, it was hard to make that many units in a certain amount of time. But if you didn't care, and you just slapped it together any old ways, and you made your bonus, but the work wasn't that good. And then, then your work got rejected. And there was a time where we had to do our own rejects on our own time. But then they pass it that if there are any rejects you get extra time for it. And uh, that's something that I could, I was never good at making bonus.

W: [Comment unclear] When you first started you were working as an assembly person. [V: Yeah] And how did, how many different things did you do as you went through Sprague's?

V: Well I started in assembly, then I went into the stock room where we dished out work to the girls. You had, anything the girl need for uh, to assemble the work, we had to put all those parts in a pan, or a tool, or whatever, and uh, then when she was ready, finished one job and she had to come in and take another one, they would be all set up for her. And you had to know all the parts. Well the specs were there, the books were there. We had to take them one by one and make sure she has everything she needs. Then from there I went on a desk. And I was on a desk for quite a few years. And then I went back on assembly. Then I went as a general operator. Then I went back into the stockroom to dish work out. And um, then towards the end I was in the shipping department where it was not just shipping all together, but so there was about six or seven different uh, jobs that I did. In twenty-five years that's not much, because some people shift two, six, seven times in a year, until they find what they like, you know. If you have the chance to sign up, you might as well, because then if you're not happy in what you're doing, the next job might even be worse, but you have the chance to find out about it. And then if you don't like that, and there's another job posted, well you just sign for that other one. The only thing that you, you like to kind of stay in one department because you built your seniority up a little bit. And you can't sign up from, sign out from one department to another, you have to sign in your own department, and establish your seniority for I don't know, three to six months, whatever it was, I can't remember now. And uh, then if there's a job opened in another department, and nobody in that department signs for it, then you have the chance to sign. Usually somebody let's you know. If they think you're interested in that job from that other department they'll let you know that the job is opened, that nobody signed for it. And then you'll more or less talk it over with your boss, because you don't just like to desert him either, you know. You like to uh, give him a couple of weeks and so he has a chance to replace you. And then you can go on.

W: Oh. Um, now were you involved in the union when you were working at Sprague?

V: No. Not, I was a member, but I was never involved in anything you know, like uh, you know, like they had a strike there at, that's when the Beaver Street plant closed after. Well I just, I didn't go to work, but I didn't go to picket either, because those things scare me.

W: Um, you started in 1950? [V: Yeah] So you weren't involved in the strikes in the 30's and the 40's? [V: uh uh] But did you hear about them when you were working at the Berkshire? No?

V: Oh yes! Yes, because I had friends working in Sprague you know, long before that, you know. And uh, but I didn't do too much. Well at that time I worked here and then I had my, raising my family. So you don't uh, I probably knew about it then, but I don't remember much of it now. That is as to what was going on, you know. Because that strike we had in Sprague's there, I don't even remember what year it was. Uh, where Beaver Street closed down after, that was such a bitter thing there that it just scared me. That's why I just stayed away from it.

W: Umhm. Now what year did you retire?

V: Oh gosh. Ten, that's '88. '76.

W: Oh, okay. I was just wondering. Um, now how did your work affect your home life and your marriage, and your work with your children? Did it interfere a lot, or was it just (--)

V: No. No. I just uh, did the best I could. We shared our work. My husband and I kind of shared the housework and the children were pretty good, you know. They were close. They were all four in seven years. So they were close together, you know. And uh, well after they were a little older, like ten, twelve, and so, they helped with the housework a little, and uh, looked after each other. And it didn't uh, bother me in the least. Everybody else was doing the same thing and it was just sort of natural.

W: Um, since a lot of your friends were at Sprague's did you go, and did you see them outside of work a lot? Or did you, were they just friends at work [rest of comment unclear]?

V: Well after my children were grown up, yes, we did see each other, yes. Uh, even up till today, once in awhile you know, we meet up and uh, and then we have our retirees, IUE Retirees Club that we meet every month. The first Monday of every month. And we get together and we have a meeting, we play bingo, or whatever other game. And uh, they usually have one big picnic in the summer. And those are all Sprague retirees.

W: Um, let's see. When you were working at the Berkshire Mill, how did World War II affect your job there? Was there any difference in the things you were producing during the war?

V: No. I, I don't, no, there was no difference. I don't think the Berkshire Mills did anything for uh, you know, like produce anything for uh, I don't recall at all them talking about it, or that it was specifically you know, for uh, war use. We were just making cloth. Unless they used it, but nothing was ever said that it was specifically for that. Like other companies used to produce the camouflage material, the, and all that other stuff. No, we just produced the same thing we did in any other time.

W: While you were working at Sprague's it wasn't during any war except for the Korean and

Vietnam wars. But was there any, what kinds of things were you producing while you were working there?

V: Well there was just transistors and condensers and capacitors. That's all I know about you know, that uh (--) Of course there might have been departments elsewhere that I didn't work, that I wasn't involved in, but uh, and they did everything from raw material from the paper. Then they rolled it, then they assembled it, and sealed it. And then they, of they put it in some solution where they called it impregnation. And then it came back. And it was a lot of different procedures you know, by the time the product was finished. But uh, I know a lot of the companies that we shipped it too, there was mostly like airlines and uh, but I don't recall any specific things that would be going like into defense or anything like that. If it was, it didn't say so, you know. So.

W: Um, let's see. Why don't we take a break for a little bit and we can (--) [Tape is turned off]

side two begins

W: Okay. Um, there's some questions I had about the things we talked about earlier. Um, one thing was what was your husband's name? I forgot to ask you that.

V: Peter.

W: Okay, Peter. Okay. And um, when you were talking about making the bonus, and making one hundred of something, what would happen if you didn't make a hundred, or the level that you were suppose to reach, whatever it was?

V: Oh, your pay would be there. You of course don't make bonus, you don't get the extra, you know. But your pay is there. But they come around and they find out why you can't make it. And uh, well maybe there's something wrong, but on the other hand maybe you're not applying yourself, you know. And so they kind of check into it. And they give you a chance, you know, to see if you can't do better, or sometimes the work is bad. It's, it comes from another department and you can't, it's not just right to go into the can, the cover won't go on, and you have to press harder, take more time. So it takes longer. Well some instances you might get a little allowance. They had cards for that, where it said waiting period, or an allowance for bad covers, or for whatever. For tight sections, or whatever. But uh, they wouldn't uh, press you, you know, into seeing if you can't make that bonus. And uh, well in some instances it helped. And you uh, they might even give you a point or two where you weren't aware of it, and that would help you. But as far as the pay goes, you would get your base pay. It's just that you weren't getting the extra that you would be if you were making the bonus.

W: Umhm. Um, now the Logues that you've given us, are those the Logues that you wrote when you were working on [few words unclear]?

V: Uh, there may be a few. Although they had, the Logues are, some of them are way before I

even went. And so they're old. It was something that was given to me by the editor of the Logue for my son for a school project. And I, they're not all there, but I saved the majority of them. And there maybe a few that I, of my own write-ups, but uh, but uh, like I said, some of them were from before I even got there. And then I didn't, didn't get on the Logue right away. Either I was there two, three years before I got into it.

W: Now were you a Logue reporter for the rest of the time that you worked at Sprague, or did you do it only for awhile?

V: Uh, I think up to about three years, because I, after Beaver Street shut down I was layed off. See you just couldn't go to another place, or another plant, although it was Sprague's, until there was room for me. So in the meantime I got myself a job a Waverly Fabrics over here just temporarily, and until they called me. And uh, then when it was my turn they called me. And for the last three years I, before I retired I worked on the Marshall Street Plant. Before that I was up to Beaver.

W: Umhm. Um, how was the work, how did the work you did there changed as the years went on? How was the work different in the seventies than in the fifties in maybe the assembling, or things like that?

V: Well as far as the assembly it was was about the same. Uh, they were getting new orders for new products. Like maybe more advanced, or sophisticated, or something. But the assembly part was still the same. The soldering part was still the same. Some of the equipment was upgraded I would say, and it was easier to work with. And uh, well when we started working there we might have had to handle each unit separately. By the time I left there they had racks where you could run a whole rack of units under a flame, or whatever and solder them all in about the same amount of time as you did just one doing it by hand, each one separately.

W: Um, how, were there any health and safety problems that developed, or were evident as the years went on into the, when you, towards the end when you started, when you were working?

V: Well anywheres I worked there were, they've always had uh, like gloves, aprons, uh, safety glasses. They were always there and they were always issued. But if someone wasn't using them, they, I don't think that they were enforced, at lest not to my knowledge. But those were the protective things, you know, like your glasses and your heavy aprons just in case you spatter a little bit of solder or so, it would just role off. [W: Umhm] And uh, then you were gloves for different things, like uh, there might be gooey stuff to handle, or you didn't have to get your hands into it. The gloves were there if you wanted to use them.

W: Umhm. Um, did the structure of the organization change while you, in the time that you were there? Did they changed from managers, or something like that?

V: Well I think from the beginning it was more relaxed. When I went in there I, oh I couldn't imagine it was so nice to work. Everybody [unclear]. The boss would come over and talk to you and all that. But after awhile, I would say after a few years, the first few years, things were more tensed. There was, you felt a little bit more pressure. Everything was suppose to have taken on that air of uh, it's important to get it right. It's important to get it today, or yesterday, you know.

It's uh, it seemed like it was always uh, pushed. You know, not only in a way to get out the work, but to get it better. To watch it more. To watch out for each other too, you know. Like not everybody is uh, what comes in to the department and catches on as fast as another person might. So we were always told about that too. Well if you see something that's not done right, don't wait till they do a whole pile of it, or so. You know, either call their attention to it, or see if you can help them out. And there was a little, as we went by I would say there was always more pressure. And of course the, then that bonus thing again. It uh, like where we might have had to do forty, or fifty units in a certain amount of time, then it would go up to sixty or seventy-five. There was things that could help out that there were better to put together. They were not quite so hard to assemble, but at the same time we had the feeling that well, we're not going to make as much bonus, because well, we have to make more an hour, or whatever.

W: Um, with the changing, changes in the process and the processes that you were using, how did you respond to those? Did you like the changes of the, well?

V: Well not always, because it wasn't always easier. It was, as a rule it was a little harder to do or so. But uh, then as you got into it, along you know, it proved that it sometimes wasn't as hard to do as we thought. And nobody likes a change. You're so set in your ways of doing certain things a certain way, that when they say well we're going to have to change it, well right away you think oh, it can't be any better, it's got to be worse. But as we got into it, it wasn't always worse. Sometimes it was just as good, or even a better way of doing it. But the demand was always there. They never wanted less, they always wanted more. So you felt the pressure.

W: Okay. Um, what departments did you work in? What were the names of the departments if you can?

V: Well the very first one, that's all they called it was assembly line. It was on Beaver Street. I don't recall if they had any special (--) Yes I remember, it was a metalized department. I was assembling in the metalized department, which uh, well you get the paper tubes and you stick them in a metal can, put the covers on, and lay them aside. And then it went on to the next person to take it over from there. And then uh, and I stayed on that for the longest time till I went in to the stockroom. And then I went on a desk. But I was always in the assembly part. You know, even when I was on production I was always assembling. Oh, but you wanted the departments. Well metalized, then we went into um, the high reliability they called it. Now whatever that meant. And um, then the last three years I worked in Tantelum Shipping Department. I didn't change too much from the departments. I changed jobs, but not the departments.

W: And about how many years did you work in your different jobs and your different departments?

V: Well I know the desk, the desk I worked seven years. And uh, then in the stockroom I worked about two, three years. And then when I went back to work it was another two, three years. And the rest of the time it was mostly assembling. And then the last year or so before I retired I was in the shipping department.

W: Um, let's see. You said you weren't, you weren't involved in the strike in '70? Was it 1970, around then, because you were afraid, or you didn't like the um (--)

V: I didn't like the atmosphere. There were, you have all your friends there and they're on two different sites. Some for it, some against it. And uh, I uh, I just didn't know how to uh, I've never been in anything like that before and I'm not, I don't like arguments, fights, bitterness, and stuff like that. So I just stayed home until it was all over with. And then I got layed off anyway, because uh, on account of the strike the Beaver Street Plant closed down. [W: Umhm] And uh, and there are, there were friends of mine that uh, I never had any quarrel with them, because like I say, if you're not out on the picket line fighting each other and kicking each other around, then you don't get into trouble. But uh, I've heard friends that were together for years and years say, I'll never speak to you for the rest of my life. You know, and I just, I'm not, I can't take that. And there wasn't that much to do anyway. Just uh, they just had a picket line to prevent the rest of the people going in. And after a day or two the people didn't go in anyway. So there wasn't really any problem there.

W: How did you feel about the uh, union leaders while you were working and involved in the union?

V: Well I never had anything to do with them. I never had any trouble you know, like I wanted to present a case, or anything, accept that time I mentioned when a job was posted and that uh, I didn't, didn't look like I was going to get the job. And I did go to our steward and she, I didn't have to go too far. All she did is go to the plant manager and told him how I felt about it. And then he had me come in. And he told me his feelings and I told him mine. And I got the job and that was it. I mean there was no arbitration, or anything like that.

W: Um, when you left Sprague you retired.

V: I retired, yeah.

W: How did you feel though when you were layed off for that time? Were you angry, or?

V: Well there was so many of us layed off that uh, not really, because any woman that gets layed off, she has a little time to catch up on her housework. [Both chuckle] No I didn't uh, I wasn't better about it. I, I didn't mind. We were collecting unemployment anyway. And uh, it uh, gave us a little time to back off a little bit and I don't know, take a second breath I guess. I had no real strong feelings about it one way or another when I was retired. When I was layed off rather. I knew it was just a matter of time that I will get called back, because I've already had twenty years seniority then. But I couldn't get transferred from one plant to another. So I had to wait till they had vacancy at the Marshall Street Plant and then they called me.

W: What did you do when you returned and were working at the Marshall Street Plant? What job did you go into then?

V: Yeah, I went into assembly. Yeah, it was in tantelum department, yeah. And uh, that was

uh, it was a different kind of an assembly, but it still was called assembly. You still had to put things together, a few pieces, and put them together.

W: What was different about that kind of assembling than what you had done before?

V: It was different because you had to assemble it and feed it into a machine. And the machine did, the next step, or whatever when, when I assembled before, we just laid in a pan and it was taken away, and somebody else was doing the next step. And this one here the next step was done by a machine. So you kind of had to uh, pace yourself so you could feed the machine without you know, wasting too much time. But it wasn't anything that was complicated, or anything. Just needed a couple of hours to catch on, that's all.

W: Uh huh. Um, how benefits? How are the retirement benefits? Are they adequate? Are you happy with your (--)

V: No. The pension is rotten. And the way it was left, that's the one bad thing about it is they never left anything open for negotiations as far as cost of living, or like the other plants. Like GE has, or that uh, when the cost of living goes up they get a raise in their pension. And the pension is uh (--) The people that are retiring now are happy with what they have, but at the time we retired it was frozen at a certain level and that's it. We can never (--) Although we are all lifetime members of the IUE, but there's nothing we can do about our pension. Well we tried, but as far as I know, nothing can be done about it.

W: Um, when you look back at your career at Sprague, how do feel about it?

V: I was, I'm very happy that I had the chance to be there. I had quite a few experiences. And you met people that you'll never forget. And it was such a different line of work from uh, weaving in the mills. But I loved weaving itself. The trade itself is very, to me it's fascinating, but the conditions were you know, the big machinery and lot of noise and greasy, oily, and all that stuff. It wasn't pleasant, but uh, (--) So the work at the Sprague was really a pleasure to work compared to that, but. And I made a lot of friends that I still keep in touch. And uh, the place, I'm, I don't, I'm not sorry you know, that I retired or anything. I don't miss the work, or, but I do miss the people sometimes. Of course a lot of my friends still keep in touch now and then. Not (--) We don't get together for reunions or something, except at the meetings. But uh, we keep in touch.

W: As you look back was there anything that you might have done differently than what you did?

V: You mean about going to Sprague, or anything like that in general, or?

W: In general, anything about you're working at Sprague that you didn't like and you would liked to have changed, or not have done?

V: I, I can't hardly say. It's uh, I can just say that there was an experience every time I changed jobs or whatever, but I don't think that there was anything that I could do different than I did

then. I mean, and that I know now, or for that matter the people who work there now, they complain. But that's natural.

W: Um, how does the situation and environment different from when you started than when you ended? Was it different, or?

V: Well it was uh, I would say there was, there's more pressure towards the end. You know, like from the beginning like I said, it was a relaxed atmosphere and uh, it uh, we were friendlier like, because we seem to have the time or so. But as the time went on, the pressure was on, and uh, and you didn't have much time to, except for the breaks, or outside of work, or so to uh, to socialize. Well when you go to work, you go to work, but I would say there uh, it was uh, just more pressure. That's all I can say is everybody had to be on their toes as the time went on, because there was more demands you know. And of course it all depends if you changed foreman, or you changed group leaders, well there was that to deal with. You had to adjust to it you know. One would be easy going, and the next one would be real rough, or sometimes he'd be very strict just to see what the situation is in the room, and then you know, he could relax or whatever. But there was always something new to deal with. But uh, I would say that I preferred the first few years in Sprague's to how I finished off. I wasn't under such pressure from the beginning.

W: Um, how do you feel now about the management and it's attitude towards the workers, or your attitude towards them?

V: Well I was brought up to always respect my elders I guess, whether they were older or younger, but I mean they were up there you know. And I have never had any real problem with any of them. It uh, if they were nice, all right. And if they were strict, or cool, or whatever, I just sent along with it. You know I just treated them as my bosses or supervisors, or whatever. I never really had any real trouble as far as that goes. I never had to fight for anything, or what. And if I asked, or if I presented my problem, something I didn't like, well it was always kind of worked out together.

W: Uh huh. Um, when Sprague reduced the work force and closed the local plants and moved away, how did you feel about that?

V: I wasn't there anymore then.

W: Umhm, but did you (--)

V: I have a sister-in-law that just retired last year. And she said it was really tough, you know, because it was uh, never knew from one day to the other. And whether, because there was for a long time they were closing the plant, but they didn't really close. You know, it was just one of those things that they, maybe next week, maybe two weeks from now, but. And everybody was kind of hanging there. And uh, the people that were on the verge of retiring, they didn't know whether they should hang on till they close the plant, or whether they should retire. I mean that's, that's what I you know, hear personally from my sister-in-law. She just finished last, this past fall. But uh, I wasn't there anymore when the real pressure was on you know, about closing

the plant, or so. I couldn't tell you.

W: Umhm. What do you think Sprague's overall impact on the community has been?

V: Well I think if we didn't have Sprague's after the Berkshire Mills closed down, it would have been a disaster around here. But uh, between, some people went off to GE, but most of them were absorbed by Sprague's. Even though they didn't make big salaries, or anything, but it was at least something you uh, you know, you make a, you made a living on. I know I would have found it very hard if uh, we had four children that were just getting into their teens, and that, and if I didn't work at Sprague's we would have found it very rough.

W: Um, I want to ask you some more about the textile mill. You were saying that the conditions there weren't that good. How did you like working there in general?

V: Well I can't say I liked it, because it was heavy. And like I say, it was dirty like uh, well cotton mill. You know, the cotton is always flying, and your nose is always itchy. And it's uh, no matter where you went around the machine, everything had to be oiled so that the gears would be going smoothly and all that. And uh, you'd get, get it all over your clothes. And like I said, weaving itself was, I was really interested in that and I enjoyed the weaving part, but it was very hard, and it was very hard work. The machine was all iron, heavy. And it was dangerous too. There was a lot of gears around that. After awhile they were protected. They put some covers on them, but from the beginning the gears were all out in the open. One time I caught my dress and ripped it right off from the waste down. I stood there, and had to send somebody home to get me another dress so I could get home after. But I didn't get hurt you know, it just that it just pulled my dress right off. After that I knew enough not to get close to them. It was dangerous too. You had to (--)

Then there were also a time where you depended on a repairman to have your machines in working order. And if your machine slam-banged, and it would start anymore, and a repairman would decide that he has somebody else's job first, yours was waiting there. And if you didn't put out a certain quota you'd hear about it. And then if uh, if your loom wasn't running right and you got some streaks in your cloth, or whatever, after they were inspecting it, you would get called down on the carpet you know, that your work is not good. And way back before I started, they used to cut that off and they would measure the material that was not right. And they would take it out of their pay. But when uh, by the time I got there they didn't uh, you know, take it out of your pay, but they would let you know about it. And if you didn't uh, do better, well you might even get layed-off. So they were pretty strict there too.

W: Um, now when you were working at the textile mill, did you have a lot of friends also there, or was it less of a network of friends than Sprague?

V: You couldn't, you couldn't socialize there at all. There were no breaks, coffee breaks, or anything. You had your lunch hour, which most of us if we were near enough, we'd run home and see if we could do something you know, or have a snack or so. And then the place was so noisy that you couldn't uh, you know, keep in touch with each other. But most of all it was mostly family. Now we had this big area there of weaving looms. And my mother and my father, and my sister and my brother, and I all worked in one area. Now I had another sister that

worked in another mill, she didn't weave. She did all, something all together different. And um, if we did want to get in touch, like I would have a girl friend across the room, which is really far, and she'd be looking at me. So I'd look at her and she, she'd say are you going dancing you know, tonight, or something like that. That's the way we communicated you know, above the noise and everything. And I'd just shake my head yes. And so then when we, and we didn't have phones then either. Some people had, but some of us didn't. Well we just uh, we knew enough by just sign language that we were going to meet that day at a certain place and go dancing, or whatever. Of course then we were single then.

W: Did you work full time at the textile mill?

V: Yes we did. And we, I thing we worked ten hours too. Yeah. And we did have lunch hour, but um, I think it was a whole hour, but uh, and uh, then they had shifts like from six in the morning till two, which uh, which is eight hours, after when they went on eight hour shifts. And they went around the clock. From six till two, from two till ten, and then from ten till six again. So I went to work on the six till two, because that gave me the afternoon to you know, do whatever I wanted to do.

W: Um, so when you changed, when you went to Sprague, it was a very big change then?

V: Um. Yeah, real big change. Yeah.

W: Did you like it [unclear]?

V: The first day I was there I sat next to this girl I never saw before. By the time we finished up, eleven o'clock, we were the best of friends. And we still are, except she moved to Florida. And uh, after about two hours work I turned around to her and I said, and we're going to get paid for this? You know, because it was like picnic you know, compared to the Berkshire Mills. Of course that didn't last too long, but I mean it was really quite a change.

W: Um. Now when, you said that when you started your sister was also was hired the same day.

V: Yeah, but she went to a different plant, so I didn't have any connection with her except after hours. But she liked it. She made some friends and she still knows a couple of people that when they meet up they uh, socialize. They uh, only we, we never got to working together, because they had to place us wherever they needed.

W: Do you have any questions?

A: I have a few. I have got two, no three follow-up questions. Um, I probably should know this, but was was the IUE?

V: That's International Union. Let's see, is that IUE? I know it's an electrical union, but it's uh.

A: It's just a big union in a large company?

V: It's a big union, yeah. It still is enforced at Sprague's now.

A: Um, you said that when you were working at the textile mill you and your parents, and you brother and your two sisters worked there. Where was your other brother?

V: Well he was too young then to go. He was the youngest one, and he didn't work there. He did work there later though, but in a different plant, you know. In the Berkshires, but they had four plants. So see, but uh, the five of us worked right in one plant.

A: Where was he while you were working?

V: Well I imagine home. But he was old enough to be (--) And we never worked the same shifts, you know. Like if I, if I worked my mother would be home and vice versa, you know. There was always somebody home.

A: Um, while you were working at Sprague's did you notice any kind of discrimination like either with men or women, or with race or anything?

V: No I didn't. We talked about it. We mentioned it a few times, but we uh, I never noticed anything like that. I mean like uh, clicks or like you say, discrimination. I mean if there was I didn't notice it.

A: Um, you said you were layed-off. What year were you layed-off?

V: Oh gosh, let's see. What did I say? I retired in '76? [A: '76] Well it would be three years before that.

A: How long was it? How long were you away from Sprague and working at Waverly?

V: Um, about a year. About a year at least. [A: Okay] And that while we were layed-off we were collecting unemployment, but we had to go and apply for job wherever we can, whether we got the job or not, we had to apply and (--)

A: Um, could you collect unemployment and still work at Waverly?

V: Oh no. [A: That was (--) You couldn't do that, okay.] No. Once I, now I, yeah. And then when I went to Waverly my unemployment checks stopped. But that was uh, I never thought I would get called in. But one day I got a call that they had you know, a place for me so I went and I worked there. And then I had the unfortunate accident of falling down three stairs and breaking my wrist. So I was out collecting my industrial insurance. And then in the meantime I kept calling Sprague's every so often. And uh, so one day I got this call and I said, well I'm sorry I still don't have room for you, but except on a night shift, not night shift, but the late shift five to eleven. I said, I don't care what it is, I just want to get back in there. And so, because I knew I would be retiring soon. So she said all right. So I went in and I worked from five till eleven. And as soon as they had a job posted for the day shift I signed for that, and I finished off on a full time shift, you know. But uh, I, but it just worked out all right, because I had a part-time job

here and then I went back to Sprague's. I probably wouldn't have retired, but my husband got sick and I said, I might as well retire and take care of him. So five years he was sick. So. And that's the way it goes.

A: That's it for me. Well thank you very much.